

**Deerfield, IL** - At a press conference held Friday morning, Congressman Kirk (R-Highland Park) revealed statistics showing a decrease in club drug use among suburban teens, but an increase in heroin related emergency room visits and deaths in Chicago's suburbs over the past three years. Joining Kirk at his press conference were Illinois State Police Chief Drug Coordinator, Terry Lemming, Kate Patton, anti-drug advocate (mother of Kelly who died of an ecstasy overdose) and Joanna Bowersmith, a former heroin addict who now educates and helps those addicted to heroin.

Kirk's press conference comes as he prepares to lead a mission to Afghanistan and the Netherlands next week to advance the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and State Department's anti-heroin and anti-club drug programs. Kirk's visit to the Netherlands follows up on an international summit he convened in 2003 at Wheeling High School where the United States, Belgium and the Netherlands signed the International Anti-Club Drug Agreement at Wheeling High School. The agreement included the establishment of an anti-synthetic drug police in the Netherlands where 90% of ecstasy is made.

"The good news is our Anti-Club Drug Strategy we signed onto with the Netherlands and Belgium is working. The amount of club drugs flowing into our country and suburban kids using them is declining," said Kirk. "The bad news is heroin use is rising among suburban teens and is a popular drug of choice among white, middle class teenagers."

Kirk's trip to Afghanistan comes as the United States prepares to launch a controversial \$700 million eradication program in Afghanistan. The production of heroin in Afghanistan is exploding with the crop more than doubling last year. Kirk noted many of the profits from Afghanistan's heroin sales are financing terrorist groups like Al Qaeda.

"Osama bin Laden is now one of the world's largest heroin dealers. With expected drug profits estimated to rise from \$2.5 billion to \$7 billion, Al Qaeda and related groups have more funding than ever," said Kirk. "The terrorist attacks on 9/11 cost only \$500,000. Al Qaeda may one day earn enough in the heroin trade to purchase nuclear weapons." The most the Colombian drug lords ever made in one year was less than \$3 billion.

The exploding heroin crop in Afghanistan also concerns Illinois State Police who reported an increase of heroin deaths over the last three years in Lake County alone. "In 2002, Lake County

had seven heroin related deaths. In 2003, there were ten and in the first quarter of 2004, seven heroin related deaths were reported. These numbers show an increasing amount of heroin overdoses in our suburbs,” said Illinois State Police Chief Drug Coordinator, Terry Lemming.

Lemming’s statistics support a study done by Roosevelt University that showed heroin use in Cook County doubled over the last decade and quadrupled in the collar counties. Chicago police also reported that in sting operations set up on the south and west sides of Chicago last year, thirty to forty percent of the people arrested came from the suburbs, many of them teenagers. Chicago police also placed cameras in high drug trafficking areas that has led to some success in arresting dealers and those who use. But despite the step up in law enforcement, heroin use among suburban teens shows no signs of declining.

“It was easier to buy heroin than buy beer,” said 23-yr-old Joanna Bowersmith, a former heroin addict who now works as a counselor at the Family and Adolescence in Recovery (FAIR) in Rolling Meadows. Bowersmith, who attended Whitney Young High School and Oak Park-River Forest High School, became addicted to heroin when she was 16-years-old. “I had a friend who used heroin. We’d drive to the West Side of Chicago. It was like going through a drive thru window. The dealer would ask what drug do you want, you’d give him cash, the dealer would give us a bag and we were on our way,” said Bowersmith. After dropping out of high school and getting kicked out of the house, she entered rehab and has been clean for nearly five years.

Despite the rise in heroin use, good news was reported regarding the use of ecstasy. State Police report a decline in ecstasy arrests and hospitalizations in Illinois over the last two years. These statistics follow a nationwide trend away from club drugs.

Kate Patton, whose daughter Kelly died of an ecstasy overdose, was pleased in the decline of club drug use among suburban kids, but urged parents to talk to their children and to look for signs of drug addiction and abuse. “I never knew what ecstasy was until the police showed up on my doorstep and told me Kelly was gone,” said Patton. “My fear is suburban parents won’t believe their son or daughter may be using heroin or ecstasy. They’ll say those drugs are not in our suburbs or our schools. But the reality is they are here, they’re easy to get and they are deadly. I will continue to work with Congressman Kirk to do everything possible to keep these drugs away from our children.”

With Al Qaeda reaping the profits of heroin sales, Kirk is determined to cut off the heroin problem at its source. He will meet with DEA agents and State Department officials in

Afghanistan and the Netherlands to discuss progress being made in their Anti-Drug programs and to determine what they need to advance their missions. His trip to Afghanistan also includes a visit with Afghan President Ahmid Karzai, who has pledged to dramatically reduce the production of heroin in his country. This is Kirk's second trip to Afghanistan.

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